

‘Epithets of the *Mantra*’ in the *Heart Sutra*

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Abstract

In this article, I continue a detailed critical re-assessment of the text of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* or *Heart Sutra* begun by Jan Nattier (1992, see also Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2015). Nattier and Yamabe pointed out that where the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has the word *mantra*, some parallel passages in the Sanskrit 8,000 and 25,000 line *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras have the word *vidyā* (Nattier 1992: 211, n.54a). I show that in every other occurrence of this passage in Sanskrit and Chinese versions of these texts, *Prajñāpāramitā* is referred to as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (*vidyā*) and there is no mention of a *mantra*. Nor would we expect one, since these texts predate the assimilation of *mantra* into Buddhism. This suggests that *mantra* in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* is a mistranslation of a Chinese rendering of *vidyā*. I explain why this might have happened in semantic and historical terms. Given that the so-called *mantra* itself is better described as a *dhāraṇī*, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there is no *mantra* in the *Heart Sutra* and no mention of a *mantra*. This raises some interesting questions.

Introduction¹

In Jan Nattier's watershed article on the *Heart Sutra*, an extra note was included as the article was going to press (1992: 211-213, n.54a). The subject of note 54a is the section of the *Heart Sutra* often referred to as the "epithets of the mantra,"² i.e.

*tasmāj jñātavyam prajñāpāramitā mahāmantra mahāvīdyāmantra
'nuttaramantro 'samāsama-mantraḥ* (Conze 1948, 1967)

In all English translations to date, *mahā-*, *mahāvīdyā*, *anuttara*, and *asamasama* are epithets that describe a mantra. Since the *Heart Sutra* apparently contains a mantra, the natural conclusion seems to have been that the epithets are epithets of *that* mantra. The *Heart Sutra* also explicitly says, "The mantra spoken in the perfection of wisdom is like this..."³ I will discuss this aspect of the passage below.

Nattier cites two letters sent to her by Nobuyoshi Yamabe who identified a number of passages in Chinese Perfection of Wisdom texts that closely parallel the epithets in the *Heart Sutra*. Nattier cites these with transliterations⁴ and translations and adds two extra passages to those identified by Yamabe. She notes that in Sanskrit counterparts of these occurrences, the word used is not *mantra*, but *vidyā*. Nattier concludes from the passages identified that "mantra" is an example of a back-translation from Chinese attributable to ambiguity in Chinese translations for the Sanskrit word *vidyā*. I will argue that it was more than a simple ambiguity. The context had to have changed significantly for *vidyā* to become *mantra*. In particular, *mantra* is a word that came into use in Buddhist texts only in association with Tantra.

To pursue this issue I identified all the occurrences of the epithets passages by searching the CBETA electronic version of the Chinese Tripiṭaka across the

¹ My thanks to Maitiu O'Ceileachair for his helpful comments on my Chinese translations; to Richard Gombrich for his willingness to support independent scholarship; and to the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge for access to their library and providing a convivial place to work.

² Nattier herself uses this phrase (1992: 177); it is also used by Lopez (1988: 110, 1990: 353, 1996: 166). The translation of T250 by Rulu (2011) goes further by specifically relating the epithets to "the Prajñā-Pāramitā [mantra]".

³ *Prajñāpāramitāyāṃ ukto mantraḥ tadyathā...* Throughout the text, there is some ambiguity in the word *prajñāpāramitā*: it is the name of the literary genre, a religious practice, the attainment of a religious ideal, and the name of a goddess.

⁴ The Chinese characters had to be left out, and one of my aims is to present the cited passages in Chinese to aid any future attempts to locate them.

Prajñāpāramitā texts that might predate the *Heart Sutra* and cross checked these with the printed Taishō Edition.⁵ This produced many more passages (more than doubling the number previously identified). I also used electronic versions of the parallel texts in Sanskrit, held in the *Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages* or GRETEL, to identify any Sanskrit counterparts. The full list of occurrences is given in Appendix 1, while in Appendix 2 the epithets are extracted for direct comparison. The passages of most interest are in the Chinese translations of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśati*) and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*) attributed to Kumārajīva (T223, T227) and Xuánzàng (T220-ii, T220-iv), and the Sanskrit counterparts of these, though other texts and versions will help to shed light on our problem.

Conze and the Epithets

In Conze’s translation of his own Sanskrit edition of the *Heart Sutra* (cited above) the “epithets of the mantra” passage reads:

Therefore, it should be known that the perfection of wisdom is a great mantra, a mantra of great insight, an unexcelled mantra, an unequalled mantra. (1948, 1967, 1973, and 1975)

There is little disagreement amongst Conze’s Sanskrit witnesses to complicate his edition at this point. He suggests that these are epithets of the Buddha applied to a mantra as a way of conveying the magical power of the mantra: “The *prajñāpāramitā*... is here envisaged as a spell” (1973: 101-104). The epithets in question are, according to Conze (1975: 102, 104), those from the familiar *Ityapi Gāthā*:

Such is the blessed Buddha: “in that state, worthy, perfectly enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practices, in a good state, a world-knower, unexcelled, a guide for guidable men, a teacher of gods and men, awakened and blessed.”⁶

⁵ Where there are differences between CEBTA and Taishō, I have favoured the printed text. For a complete survey of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in Chinese, see Orsborn (2008) or Conze (1978).

⁶ *ityapibuddhobhagavāṃstathāgato rhansamyaksambuddhovidyācaraṇasampannaḥsugatolokavid anuttaraḥ puruṣadamyasārathiḥ śāstā devamanuṣyāṇāṃ buddho bhagavāniti (Āryatiratnānusmṛti Sūtra. <http://www.dsbcproject.org/āryatiratnānusmṛtisūtram/āryatiratnānusmṛtisūtram>. In Pāli known as the *Itipi so Gāthā*). Though it is traditionally one of the epithets, there is reason to think that *anuttara* in*

Of the terms in *Heart Sutra*, only *anuttara* “unexcelled” has an actual parallel and it is a rather common superlative applied to any and all Buddhist ideals. So Conze’s assertion about the epithets seems implausible. Conze has followed previous translators as translating all of the epithets as *karmadhāraya* compounds: i.e. “a [superlative] mantra”. Richard Gombrich has suggested that the two compounds *anuttaramantra* and *asamasamamantra* might be more naturally read as *tatpuruṣa* compounds, i.e. “the mantra of the [one who is] unexcelled”; and “the mantra of the [one who is] unequalled.”⁷ If this were the case, the epithets would be epithets of the Buddha or of *Prajñāpāramitā*, rather than the *mantra*. However, the other two epithets—*mahāmantra* and *mahāvīdyāmantra*—are clearly *karmadhāraya* compounds and provide a context for reading the others similarly. In the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*, the compound is replaced by a phrase, e.g. “this unexcelled knowledge” (*anuttaraiṣā vidyā*), which also argues for reading the later compounds as *karmadhāraya*. In the 40 or so published English translations that I have access to, all concur with Conze’s translation, except for Beal (1865) who also reads the compounds as *karmadhāraya*, but has *dhāraṇī* for *mantra*.⁸

From the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* we now move to the Chinese versions.

The Chinese Heart Sutra Texts

There are three versions of the short text *Heart Sutra* in the Chinese *Tripitaka*, of which we will focus on two:

T2509 摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經 = *Mahāprajñāpārami[tā]-mahāvīdyā-sūtra.

T251 般若波羅蜜多心經 = Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra.

fact goes with *purisadammasārathi*. Cf *Bhagavā pana, bhante, anuttaro purisadammasārathi. "Kathaṃ pana, bhante, bhagavā purisadammaṃ vinetī" ti?* (AN 2.112) Here “*anuttaro purisadammasārathi*” seems to be one unit meaning “the best charioteer of men to be tamed”. This means that the last two words *buddho* and *bhagavān* are two separate epithets.

⁷ Personal communication, 22 Feb 2017.

⁸ A survey of English language translations is beyond the scope of this article.

⁹ When citing texts from the Chinese *Tripitaka* I have adopted the following conventions: when citing a text generally, I refer to it by the running number in the Taishō Edition; when citing a passage from a text I refer to the volume, page, section, and column in the Taishō Ed. When referring to Xuánzàng’s massive *Prajñāpāramitā* compilation I also cite the fascicle number to aid in locating it.

The other text, T256, once connected with Xuánzàng, is now generally considered to be a later version attributed to Amoghavajra (705–774).¹⁰ Another variation can be found in the commentary by Woncheuk (T1711), but it merely adds the character 等 “and so on” twice (Lusthaus 2003:81 ff.), so I won’t consider it here. T250 is attributed to Kumārajīva and T251 is attributed to Xuánzàng, though Nattier has plausibly cast doubt on these attributions because both texts seem to post-date their putative translators (1992: 184ff). The epithets passage is one in which the two texts differ slightly:

T250: “Hence, we know that the Prajñā-Pāramitā [Mantra] is the great illumination [大明呪] mantra, the unsurpassed illumination mantra [無上明呪], the unequalled illumination mantra [無等等明呪]” (Rulu 2011)11

T251: “Therefore know that the Prajna Paramita is the great transcendent mantra [大神呪], it is the great bright mantra [大明呪], utmost mantra [無上呪], is the supreme mantra [無等等呪].” (Mu 2010)12

T220-ii 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 401-478), by Xuánzàng. (659-663 CE)

These two recent translations give a flavour of how the Chinese texts are typically translated. In the Chinese epithets there is often a one-to-one correspondence with Sanskrit, e.g. 大 = *mahā* (great), 無 = *a-* (un-, not), 上 = *uttara* (higher, superior), and 等 = *sama* (equal).

The two characters 呪 and 呪 are simple graphical variants and both pronounced /*tjʊs/ in the Zhengzhang reconstruction of Old Chinese (2000), though some texts show a preference for one or the other.¹³ Where they occur in

¹⁰ The preface of T256 in the Taishō edition says that the text was transcribed by Amoghavajra, referring to him by his “imperially conferred posthumous name... (He whose) great deeds are right and broad (大辦正廣),” dating the text to before his death 774 (Hurvitz 1977: 110), even if the preface post-dates him. A Chinese ms. of T256 was found at Dunhuang (British Library Manuscript Or.8210/S.5648), which says that the text was “edited” by Amoghavajra (Tanahashi 2014: 68).

¹¹ 故知般若波羅蜜 是大明呪，無上明呪，無等等明呪， (8.847c24-25)

¹² 故知般若波羅蜜多，是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪， (8.848c18-19)

¹³ Where the printed Taishō edition has 呪, the online CEBTA Tripiṭaka tends inconsistently to favour 呪.

the *Heart Sutra* it is usual to assume that 咒/呪 should be read as a standalone word meaning *mantra*, leading to combinations such as 明呪 or 神呪 being treated as two words (as above). T250 consistently uses 明呪 instead of 呪 for *mantra*, suggesting that we read it as one word. As will become clear, this word ought to be *vidyā*. This is reflected in the title of T250 as well, viz. ...大明呪經, which I translate as *Mahāvīdyā Sūtra* (as does Huifeng 2009). In the first published English translation of the *Heart Sutra* in English, completed before the Sanskrit text or its translations were published, Beal translates 咒 as *dhāraṇī* (1865: 28), a point to which I will return.

T250 omits the epithet “great transcendent mantra” (大神咒), leaving only three epithets. We will see below that the number of epithets varies throughout the parallel passages. T250 only uses the verb 是 “is” in the first instance and leaves it tacit subsequently, whereas T251 repeats it each time.

In T251 only, we find *Prajñāpāramitā* described as 大神咒 “a great transcendent mantra”. 神 is a term from Daoism that generally means “spirit” or “soul” (sometimes translated as “divinity”). It is also used to translate Sanskrit *ṛddhi* “supernatural power”, *anubhava* “power, majesty”, or *deva* “god”. As we will see, the use of 神 in this context is mainly associated with the *Prajñāpāramitā* translations of Xuánzàng, the single exception being T225 《大明度經》 by Zhī Qiān (225 CE). On 神, Nattier says, “My assumption is that the person who translated the text into Sanskrit simply chose not to include an equivalent of this character.” (1992: 213, n.55). The other possibility is that the text used by that translator lacked this term, i.e. that the Chinese source text was more like T250 than like T251. The *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* lists 神咒 as one of many variant “spellings” of *mantra* used in Chinese texts, so it’s also possible that 大神咒 is a translation of *mahāmantra* and is thus a synonym for 大明呪, though if this is true it is unclear why Xuánzàng might have used both.

Sources of the Epithets

As is now widely known, the core of the Chinese text of the *Heart Sutra* (not including the epithets) is almost identical to Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra (Pañcaviṃśati)* (T223 8.223a13-20). The *Heart Sutra* is not so much a “condensation” as suggested by Conze, but a framed extract. There is a certain amount of continuity amongst the various *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Longer versions of the text are literally expansions of shorter versions, though the manuscripts of the longer versions are not necessarily

later, since each text appears to have continued to evolve independently. Of these texts, the versions in 8,000 and 25,000 lines¹⁴ were by far the most important in China, as indicated by the multiple translations of each in the Tripiṭaka (seven and four respectively), though an 18,000 line version may have been popular in central Asia (Conze 1978: 10).

Three Chinese translations of *Pañcaviṃśati* are preserved in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*:

- T221 《放光般若經》 by Mokṣala (291 CE)
 T223 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 by Kumārajīva (404 CE)
 T220-ii 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 401-478), by Xuánzàng. (659-663 CE)¹⁵

There is also T222 《光讚經》 (8.147-218) a partial translation by Dharmarakṣa (286 CE), which omits our passages. There are two published editions of the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*: Dutt (1934), which finishes at Chapter 21 (thus does not contain the epithets passage), and Kimura (2010) a new critical edition of the whole text, based on four manuscripts from Nepal. A recent facsimile edition of one of the Gilgit *Pañcaviṃśati* manuscripts by Karashima et al. (2016) makes this text more accessible, but no transcription or edition has been published.¹⁶

Conze’s translation, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* (1975a), is based on a patchwork of various Sanskrit manuscripts from the extended *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition. At best, it can only indicate the general outline of the text, which seems to have been Conze’s intention.

¹⁴ Apart from the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*, none of the early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts is written in verse, though *Vajracchedikā* does paradoxically refer to itself as consisting of *catuṣpadikām gātham* (Vaj 8) “verses consisting of four quarters”. The number of lines a text occupied was dependent on the size of the leaves it was written on and the scribe’s handwriting. This may be why it was common to use the *śloka*—a meter of $4 \times 8 = 32$ syllables—as a measure of length. In this measure, *sāhasrikā* works out at 32,000 syllables (Gombrich, personal communication 22 Feb 2017). However, it has become customary in English to treat *sāhasrikā* as referring to “lines”.

¹⁵ Xuánzàng’s translations occur within his 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 *Dābōrēbōluómìduō-jīng*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T220), a compendium of 16 *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in 600 fascicles, covering three volumes in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*. Vols. 5-6 are taken up with a version of the 100,000 line text. Vol. 7 contains the remaining texts. The fact that the *Heart Sutra* is not included in T220 is evidence that undermines attribution of T251 to Xuánzàng.

¹⁶ For more information about the state of scholarship on this text and its manuscripts, see Karashima et al (2016).

Nattier (1992: 186ff) conjectures that T250 is extracted from or influenced by T1509 《大智度論》 *Dàzhìdùlùn* = Sanskrit **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, a commentary, attributed to Nāgārjuna, on *Pañcaviṃśati* incorporating the text and also translated by Kumārajīva (and thus employing similar or identical terminology). In the case of the epithets passage, T1509 and T223 are identical, so I will not comment on this issue here.

Nattier and Yamabe identified some epithet passages in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*) translations by Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng. There are seven Chinese translations related to the *Aṣṭa*:

- T224 《道行般若經》 by Lokakṣema (179 CE).
 T225 《大明度經》 by Zhī Qiān (225 CE);
 T226 《摩訶般若鈔經》 by Zhú Fóniàn (382 CE).
 T227 《小品般若經》 by Kumārajīva (408 CE)
 T220-iv 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 538-555), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)
 T220-v 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 556-565), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)¹⁷
 T228 《佛母出生三法藏般若波羅蜜多經》 by Dānapāla (985 CE).

Further comparative information on the various Chinese *Aṣṭa* translations can be found in Karashima (2011). In Sanskrit, there are two editions, Mitra (1888) and Vaidya (1960). Conze’s translation (1973a) is from the former. I have used Vaidya’s edition, simply because it was available both in print and electronically.

The epithets passage can also be found in the Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or 18000 line text (*Aṣṭadaśa*), by Xuánzàng (T220-iii; Vol. 7, Fasc. 479-537). Since these are identical to the passages found in T220-ii, I’ve merely noted the bibliographic details alongside references to the *Pañcaviṃśati* passages. Again, the identical passage

¹⁷ A translation of a long fragment of text that closely resembles *Aṣṭa*.

is found in Xuánzàng’s translation of the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or 100,000 line text (*Śata*) (T200-i; Vol. 5-6, fasc. 1-400) and I only note bibliographic details. Conze (1962) has published a partial Sanskrit text of *Aṣṭadaśa*, but no Sanskrit text of *Śata* has yet been published. A 10,000 line version is preserved in Tibetan only (Conze 1978: 45ff). I have not consulted this version.

A translation of *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā* (Rgs) was made by Fǎxián 法賢 in 991CE, 《佛母寶德藏般若波羅蜜經》 *Collection of Precious Virtues of the Mother of the Buddhas Perfection of Wisdom Text* (T229). I consulted the Sanskrit edition by Yuyama (1976). Conze places this text alongside *Aṣṭa* or perhaps a little earlier in the timeline of *Prajñāpāramitā* text production, though the text that survives was reorganised by Haribhadra in the 8th century to fit the chapter structure of *Aṣṭa* (1978: 9-10). A fragment of the epithets passage can be identified in both the Sanskrit and the Chinese versions of *Rgs*.

As well as these primary sources, there are a number of ancient commentaries (see Lopez 1988, 1996; Hyun Choo 2006; Shih & Lusthaus 2006). Most of these are from a few centuries after the probable date of composition of the *Heart Sutra* and all are manifestly sectarian. The commentaries by Xuánzàng’s students—Kuījī 窺基 (T1710) and Woncheuk 測撰 (T1711)—are much closer to the time of composition and both presumably influenced by Xuánzàng. Both treat the *Heart Sutra* as epitomising Yogācāra doctrines. Kuījī is considered, along with Xuánzàng, to be the co-founder of the Chinese 法相 Fǎxiàng Yogācāra School. Lusthaus places Woncheuk’s commentary, T1711, shortly after the death of Xuánzàng in 664 (2003: 66).

Despite the proliferating occurrences noted by Yamabe and Nattier and added to in this study, by comparing the context of all of the occurrences we can see that there are in fact just two passages, with minor variations, that are potential sources for the *Heart Sutra* epithets passage, each followed by a distinct identifying passage. To make the subject manageable, all of the parallels will be noted in appendixes, and in the body of the article I will focus on the two passages as they occur in Kimura’s Sanskrit edition of *Pañcaviṃśati* and in Kumārajīva’s (Kj) translation (T223), and make comparisons with other texts where relevant.

Passage One

What distinguishes Passage One is that good-sons (善男子 = *kulaputra*) or good daughters (善女人 = *kuladuhitr*),¹⁸ train (學) in the *Prajñāpāramitā vidyā* (明呪) and it enables them to be peaceful, or to not cause harm (惱)¹⁹ to themselves or others.²⁰ In Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Pañcaviṃśati* (T223) Passage One reads

“The Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā* (大明呪), an unexcelled *vidyā* (無上明呪). If a *kulaputra* or *kuladuhitr* trains in this *vidyā*, then they do not intend harm to themselves, or others, or both.²¹

This passage with minor variations is found in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-i, 5.568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-ii, 7.151.a29-b3 (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-iii, 7.551.b10-14 (fasc. 501). Xuánzàng routinely adds two epithets that don’t have parallels in other Chinese translations or in the extant Sanskrit texts, i.e. “great *vidyā*” or “great supernatural *vidyā*” (大神呪)²² and “Queen of all *vidyās*” (一切呪王 = *sarvavidyārājñī?*). Here 王 means, “king, monarch” and I am reading “queen” because in Sanskrit *vidyā* is a feminine noun. The Sanskrit counterpart to this is:

Kauśika, this perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvidyā*);
this perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā* (*anuttaraiṣā*)

¹⁸ Both Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng use the same character 善 to translate Skt. *kuśala*, i.e. ‘good, virtuous, kind, friendly’. So in Chinese 善男子/善女人 takes on the connotation of *virtuous* son or daughter, which in China may have had connotations of filial piety (孝 xiào).

¹⁹ “Although the basic meaning of 惱 is vexation, anxiety or worry, perhaps a better translation here is ‘to harm’, or ‘the intent to cause harm.’” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication) Compare the translation of T229 below. Xuánzàng has 害 = *vyābādha* “hurt, injury”.

²⁰ Compare *Mahādūkkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN 13) describing someone in the *jhānas*. “At that time he does not intend harm for himself, or harm for another, or harm for both; at that time he experiences only the experience of being free of the desire to harm. I say that the supreme happiness is the experience of [having no desire to] harm.” (*neva tasmim samaye attabyābādhāyapi ceteti, na parabyābādhāyapi ceteti, na ubhayabyābādhāyapi ceteti, abyābajjhamyeva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti. Abyābajjhaparamāhaṃ, bhikkhave, vedanānaṃ assādaṃ vadāmi.* i.89). Compare MĀ 99: 彼於爾時不念自害，亦不念害他，若不念害者，(T 1.586a19-20). Also MN iii.21f., SN iv.339, AN i.157-9, 216 (*attabyābādhāyapi ceteti...*); and cf. MN i.414 (*attabyābādhāyapi saṃvattēyya...*), MN ii.115, AN i.114 (*attabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati...*).

²¹ 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪，是無上明呪。若善男子善女人，於是明呪中學，自不惱身，亦不惱他，亦不兩惱。(8.283b9-11 = T1509 25.463.c07-8)

²² See the discussion of 神呪 above.

vidyā). For here, Kauśika, a good son or daughter training in this [*vidyā*] does not intend harm for themselves, for another, or for both.²³

Here the Gilgit manuscript describes *Prajñāpāramitā* as, *mahāvīdyā*, *anuttarā vidyā*, and *niruttarā vidyā*.²⁴ This passage can be traced back to the *Aṣṭa* in both Chinese and Sanskrit. In Kumārajīva’s translation of *Aṣṭa* T227, we find:

“The *prajñāpāramitā* is a great incantation (大呪術), a supreme incantation (無上呪術). Sons and daughters of good family should learn this incantation.”²⁵

Here *vidyā* is translated by Kumārajīva as 呪術 “incantation”, possibly influenced by Mokṣala (T221, see Passage Two below); whereas a few pages later in Passage Two he uses the more familiar 明呪. This is further evidence that 明呪 was intended as one word elsewhere.

Xuánzàng’s translations are: T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11 (fasc. 540) = T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1 (fasc. 557). Lokakṣema’s 179 CE translation (T224, 8.431.c12-21), the first in Chinese, describes *Prajñāpāramitā* as 極大祝 “an extremely great incantation” and 猛祝 “an outstanding incantation”.²⁶ Zhī Qiān, 46 years later, also has a slightly different terminology (T225, 8.484.a1-4): in his text, the *Prajñāpāramitā* is the *vidyā* (神呪) of all Buddhas (諸佛) and Queen of *vidyās* (呪中之王矣). The phrase “Queen of *vidyās*” is used by Xuánzàng in some of his translations, but not by other translators. This raises the possibility that a particular branch of the Sanskrit manuscript tradition had *mahāvīdyārājñī* at

²³ *mahāvīdyaiṣā kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā, anuttaraiṣā* [55] *kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā. atra hi kauśika śikṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā nātmavyābādhāya cetayate, na paravyābādhāya cetayate, nobhayavyābādhāya cetayate.* (Kimura PSP_2-3:54-5). Conze’s translation (1975a: 229; Chp 27).

²⁴ *mahāvīdyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā | [9] anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | niruttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā atra ca vidyāyāṃ ś[i]kṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā nātmavyābādhāya. [10] cetayate | na pa[ra]vyā[bā]dhāya cetayate | nobhayavyā[bā]dhāya cetayate ||* (Karashima et. al. 2016, 141v line 8-10; my transcription).

²⁵ 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術。(8.542.b5-6)

²⁶ Chinese text revised per Karashima (2011: 64). In ancient China 祝 was the title of the person who oversaw ritual offerings or who was in charge of fires and incense in temples. It also meant, “to pray”. (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

this point and others did not. That said, *mahāvīdyārājñī* is not found in any of the extant Sanskrit mss. Finally Zhú Fóniàn (T226, 8.514.a28-03) has just two epithets: “extremely great *vidyā*” (極大呪) and “preserves the excellence of the *vidyā*” (持尊之呪).

The Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* has the same passage but with six epithets.

Kauśika, the perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvīdyā*); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (*apramāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (*aparimāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (*anuttara*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled (*asama*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless (*asamasameyaṃ*) *vidyā*. What is the reason? For here, Kauśika, a kulaputra or kuladuhitṛ, training in this *vidyā* would not intend harm for themselves, for another or for both.²⁷

Note that *apramāṇa* and *aparimāṇa* are close synonyms, as are *asama* and *asamasama*. As far as extant manuscripts go, *Aṣṭa* is more elaborate than *Pañcaviṃśati* at this point, despite the latter being notionally a development from the former. The texts seem to have continued to evolve independently of the process of expansion, i.e. after Buddhists expanded *Aṣṭa* to produce *Pañcaviṃśati*, they continued to tinker with *Aṣṭa*. The Gilgit *Pañcaviṃśati* has three epithets in Passage One, while the later Nepalese mss. have only two. That the extra terms are not found in any Chinese translation suggests that this feature may be a late addition to the manuscripts from India.

Passage Two

The second passage is very similar in its phrasing, but the epithets are followed by a reference to the Buddhas of the three times and ten directions (*atītānāgata-pratyutpannā daśaśi*) attaining unexcelled perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) as a result of knowledge (*vidyā*) of the perfection of wisdom.

²⁷ *mahāvīdyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamasameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / tatkasya hetoḥ? atra hi kauśika [28] vidyāyāṃ śikṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitṛ vā nātmavyābādhāya cetayate, na paravyābādhāya cetayate, nobhayavyābādhāya cetayate / (Vaidya 27-28) Cf. Conze 1973a: 104*

In all the texts, Passage Two comes a few pages after Passage One in the same chapter.

Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśati*, T223, reads:

[Śakra said] “Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā* (大明呪), an unexcelled *vidyā* (無上明呪), an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等明呪). Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom can remove all evil *dharmas* (不善法 = *akuśaladharmāḥ*) and enable all good *dharmas* (善法 = *kuśaladharmāḥ*).”

Then the Buddha said to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “Yes! Yes! Kauśika, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā*, an unexcelled *vidyā*, an unequalled *vidyā*. Why is that? Kauśika, because all the Buddhas of the past have used this *vidyā* to attain supreme perfect awakening and all the Buddhas of the future and the Buddhas of the ten directions, because of this *vidyā*, have attained to supreme, perfect awakening.”²⁸

We find this passage in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-ii 7.156.a17-22; (fasc. 429) = T220-i 5.580.b27-c13 (Fasc. 105)²⁹ = T220-iii 7.556.a24-26; (fasc. 502). Here Xuánzàng refers to the *Prajñāpāramitā* as 大神明呪王, which is probably another rendering of Sanskrit *mahāvīdyārājñī* (compare Zhī Qiān’s, “Queen of *vidyās*” 呪中之王矣 and Xuánzàng’s “Queen of all *vidyās*” 一切呪王 in T225 above). This raises the possibility that Xuánzàng intended 大神明呪 to be read as *vidyā*. Though not found in the Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, the term *mahāvīdyārājñī* is found in Buddhist literature especially in relation to *dhāraṇī* and other apotropaic texts. Xuánzàng doesn’t use the phrase 大神明呪王 in Passage One of T220-iv or in either passage in T220-v. The only other translator who uses the phrase is Zhī Qiān (225 CE) whose 明呪中之王矣 in Passage One also represents *mahāvīdyārājñī*.³⁰

²⁸ 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(8.286b28-c7 = T1509, 25.468.b21-25).

²⁹ Here T220-i is elaborated with filler material, mainly extra repetitions, but is essentially the same text.

³⁰ Taishō has a note here to say that Tempyō ms (739 CE) and the Chinese ms of the Sui (531-617) have 祝 for 呪.

Mokṣala, in T221, has a quite different translation:

Bhagavan: this perfection of wisdom is a very great art (極大術),
this perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed art (無上之術), this
perfection of wisdom is an art without equal (無等之術).³¹

Here *vidyā* is translated as 術 meaning “technique, art, or skill”, cf. Kumārajīva’s “incantation” 呪術 (literally *dhāraṇī*-technique?) above. This conveys the more practical meanings of *vidyā* quite well, but lacks the soteriological connotations that are part of the definition of *vidyā*.

The first part of this passage, Śakra’s declaration to the Buddha, is missing from Kimura’s Sanskrit edition³², but we pick up from the Bhagavan’s reply, which in any case repeats Śakra’s words.³³

This being said, the Bhagavan said this to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “This is so Kauśika, this is so. Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvidyā*); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā* (*anuttarā vidyā*); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unequalled *vidyā*. What is the reason? Because, Kauśika, all those perfect Buddhas, who are worthy and fully awakened Tathāgatas in the three times and the ten directions, awaken and will awaken in the future to the unexcelled, perfect awakening having arrived at just this perfection of wisdom.”³⁴

³¹ 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術，般若波羅蜜無上之術，般若波羅蜜者無等之術。(8.48.b14-22; fs. 7, chp.25). “In Mokṣala’s very early translation 是 is an anaphoric pronoun, ‘this’, not a verb. Here 為 is the verb ‘to be’. This is characteristic of an early period of Chinese language.” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

³² In the Gilgit ms. the missing passage reads: “Śakra said: ‘Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā*; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā*; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unequalled *vidyā*. Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom dries up all unskilful dharmas and upholds all skilful dharmas.’” *śakra ahā | mahāvidyeyam bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā | anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā [13] asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoh | tathā hi bhagavan prajñāpāramitā sarvakuśalānam dharmā[nām] uccho[ṣa]yitrī sarvākuśalānam dharmānam dātrī* | (Karashima et. al. 2016, folio 146v. lines 12-13; my transcription).

³³ This passage is omitted from Dutt. Nattier (1992: 213) was writing before the publication of Kimura’s edition of the *Pañcaviṃśati* so was not able to provide a Sanskrit counterpart. Compare Conze (1975a: 237).

³⁴ *evam ukte bhagavān śakraṃ devānām indram etad avocat: evam etat kauśikaivam etat, mahāvidyeyam kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttareyam kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyam kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā. tat kasya hetoh? tathā hi kauśika ye ‘tītānāgatapratyutpannā daśadiśi loke tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ*

As with Passage One, we can trace Passage Two in the various versions of *Aṣṭa*. In Kumārajīva’s translation T227 the most pertinent part is:

Prajñāpāramitā is a great *vidyā* (大明呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unsurpassed *vidyā* (無上呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等呪).³⁵

Again, Xuánzàng’s translation, T220-iv, is more elaborate with five epithets to Kumārajīva’s three:

Prajñāpāramitā is a great *vidyā* (大神呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is a great *vidyā* (大明呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unsurpassed *vidyā* (無上呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is the queen of all *vidyās* (一切呪王).³⁶

Lokakṣema’s translation, T224 (8.433.b22-3), has three epithets compared to the two in Passage One, i.e. “an extremely great incantation” (極大祝), “a supremely venerable incantation” (極尊祝), and “an unequalled incantation” (無有輩祝). Zhī Qiān’s translation, T225, provides only one epithet here, i.e. “greatly honoured *vidyā*” (大尊咒) (8.484.b13-15). Zhú Fóniàn, T226 (8.515.c12-20) has three epithets which, apparently following Lokakṣema, he translates, “an extremely great *vidyā*” (極大呪), “a supremely venerable *vidyā*” (極尊呪), and “an unequalled *vidyā*” (無有輩呪). The counterpart Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* reads:

When this was said Śakra, Lord of the Devas, said this to the Bhagavan: “Bhagavan, the perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvīdyā*); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (*apramāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (*aparimāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (*niruttarā*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled

sarve te imām eva prajñāpāramitām āgamyānuttarām samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhā abhisambudhyante abhisambhotsyante ca. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70) The Gilgit ms. has the same epithets here.

³⁵ 般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。(8.543b25-29) In the Taishō Ed. this occurs under a subheading: 摩訶般若波羅蜜明咒品第四 “*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-vidyā*, Section Four.”

³⁶ 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，(7.777.c05-6). Compare T220-v, fasc. 557 (7.875.a2-7).

(*asama*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless
(*asamasama*) *vidyā*.³⁷

This is followed, as above, by the Buddha’s reply. Here again, *Aṣṭa* doubles up some of the epithets: *apramāṇa* = *aparimāṇa*; and *niruttara* = *anuttara*; and *asama* = *asamasama*. We saw the use of *niruttara* in the Gilgit ms. parallel of Passage One.

We conclude this survey of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature by noting that we can even get a glimpse of the *Heart Sutra* passage in *Rgs*, T229:

This great *vidyā* (大明) of perfect wisdom is the mother of all Buddhas,
Able to remove distress in all world spheres,
All the Buddhas of the three times and the ten directions,
Schooled in this knowledge are the supreme masters.³⁸

This corresponds to the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text:

This perfection of wisdom of the Jinās is a great *vidyā*,
In the realm abounding in beings, whose nature is suffering, grief,
and darkness.
The world protectors of past and future, in the ten directions, who,
Trained in this *vidyā*, are the unexcelled kings of the knowledgeable.³⁹

Here, 大明 corresponds to *mahāvidyā* in the Sanskrit text. Fāxián was constrained to translate each line of verse as seven Chinese characters, so

³⁷ *evam ukte śakro devānām indro bhagavantam etad avocat - mahāvidyeyam bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyam bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / niruttareyam bhagavān vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / (Vaidya 1960: 36-7).*

³⁸ 大明般若諸佛母，能除苦惱徧世界，所有三世十方佛，學此明得無上師。(8.678.a4-5)

³⁹ *mahavidya prajña ayu pāramitā jinānām | dukhadharmaśokaśamanī pṛthusattvadhātoḥ || ye ‘tīta’ nāgatadaśaddiśa lokanāthā | ima vidya śikṣita anuttaravaidyārājāḥ || Rgs 3.5 || . (Yuyama 1976: 23 = Conze 1973a: 15):*

even though 明 literally means “bright” we have to read it here as a poetic abbreviation of 明呪 i.e. as *vidyā*. If Conze is correct in his assumption that *Rgs* is the earliest of all the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, then here we see the epithets passage in its earliest form, though we now have reason to believe that *Aṣṭa* was composed in Gāndhārī (Falk & Karashima 2012).

Comparing the two passages in *Pañcaviṃśati*, Passage Two seems more likely to be the source of the epithets passage in the *Heart Sutra* than Passage One. In fact, the wording of Kumārajīva’s *Pañcaviṃśati* (T223) is identical to the *Heart Sutra* text attributed to him (T250). Also the association with the idea of all the Buddhas of the three times awakening through *Prajñāpāramitā* is similar to the immediately preceding part of the *Heart Sutra*.

Vidyā vs. Mantra

Yamabe observed that in Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* is a *vidyā* and not a *mantra* or a *dhāraṇī* (Nattier 1992, n. 54a). The present survey confirms this and across a wider range of texts. The Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* literature *always* refers to *Prajñāpāramitā* as a *vidyā* rather than as a *mantra*. So how did the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*, which is after all a quote from the Large *Prajñāpāramitā* text, come to have the word *mantra*? I will look at the problem from two angles: semantics and chronology.

Semantics

Conze asserts that *vidyā* is “untranslatable” (1975b: 122) and renders it both as “science” (122) and “lore” (237). *Vidyā* derives from the verbal root √*vid* “to know, to discover” (cognate with “wise, wisdom” etc). Sometimes *vidyā* is translated as “science”, but the whole context is pre-scientific so this is anachronistic. *Vidyā* refers to knowledge in a particular field: knowledge of the Vedas, knowledge of political governance, etc. Knowledge cultivated through learning and experience, rather than divinely inspired knowledge or insight. It also has a magical connotation. Knowledge in the sense of *vidyā* bestows control over the subject studied; when one thoroughly knows a subject one is said to have “mastered” it. In the context of *Prajñāpāramitā*, *vidyā* seems to mean knowledge in verbal form that has specific apotropaic and/or soteriological value in a Buddhist context.

Knowing, as we now do, that the surviving Sanskrit texts all have *vidyā*, we can confidently read the many Chinese variants—祝, 咒, 呪, 明, 明呪, 術, 呪

術, 神呪, and 神明咒—in this context as translations of *vidyā*. The common element, with a few exceptions already discussed, is a character pronounced /tjus/ in Old Chinese (Mandarin *zhòu*). Lokakṣema’s translations have the synonym 祝 “incantation” pronounced /tjugs/ (Mandarin *zhù*).

The Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has four epithets. Although numbers vary, only Xuánzàng’s translations have more than three, and specifically the version of the *Heart Sutra* attributed to him (T251) has four. Where most Chinese texts have something resembling the core epithets of “great”, “unsurpassed” and “unequaled” (大明, 無上, and 無等等), the translation of *Aṣṭa* by Zhī Qiān (T225) only has two, i.e. “*vidyā* of all the Buddhas” (諸佛神呪) and “Queen of *vidyās*” (呪中之王矣) corresponding to Xuánzàng’s “great *vidyā*” (大神呪) and “Queen of all *vidyās*” (一切呪王). There is no extant Sanskrit manuscript with these two extra epithets.

Against this reading, we have the commentaries produced by Xuánzàng’s two main students, Kuījī and Woncheuk, both of which understand 明呪 as two words. As noted above, Beal, relying on a Tang Dynasty commentary, renders 咒 as *dhāraṇī* (1865: 28). In Kuījī’s commentary, T1710, he prefaces his gloss on this section of the text with a well known fourfold classification of types of *dhāraṇī* that occurs in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (translated by Xuánzàng). This suggests that Kuījī is also reading 呪/咒 as *dhāraṇī*, even though both Hyun Choo (2006) and Shih & Lusthaus (2006) render the character as *mantra* in their translations of these early commentaries.

Woncheuk (T1711) glosses 大明呪 as: “[Because] it dispels darkness (暗) and removes ignorance (除癡), it is called the great-bright-*dhāraṇī* (大明呪).”⁴⁰ Woncheuk uses the character 暗 “dark” as a contrast to 明 “bright”, which suggests he understood 明呪 as two words, in this case “bright *dhāraṇī*” rather than *vidyā*. But he also describes it as “removing ignorance” 除癡 so perhaps he was aware of the ambiguity, since *avidyā* is a common word for ignorance. Kuījī glosses 明 as a standalone character: “it breaks through where there is no light.”⁴¹

Woncheuk seemingly had a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Heart Sutra* to consult. Lusthaus refers to it as a Sanskrit “original” (2003:83), though this assertion appears to go beyond the evidence available. That a Sanskrit text was available

⁴⁰ 遣暗除癡稱大明呪。(33.551.c03)

⁴¹ 無幽不燭曰明 (33.0542a17) An alternative reading is: “shining through all darkness” (Shih 2001: 122)

in China after Xuánzàng’s death is not evidence that it preceded any Chinese version. On the contrary, we fully expect a Sanskrit version to be available in China before Xuánzàng’s death, especially if Nattier’s conjecture is right and Xuánzàng himself translated the *Heart Sutra* from Chinese into Sanskrit.

To sum up, we have considered all of the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the *Aṣṭa* and *Pañcaviṃśati*, plus a few related texts. All the Sanskrit texts have *vidyā* where the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has *mantra*. I have shown that all of the Chinese *Prajñāpāramitā* texts have read *vidyā* as well, although Tang Dynasty commentators seem to have understood 咒/呪 to mean *dhāraṇī*. I believe we can explain these discrepancies with reference to Jan Nattier’s hypothesis that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in China, combined with some observations about how the Buddhist lexicon changed over time.

Context and Chronology

The different parts of The *Heart Sutra* tell us that it was composed in an environment of devotion to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, of meditative practices involving examination of the *skandhas*, and of *dhāraṇī* chanting. These are all mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhist practices in China in the early Medieval Period (cf. Copp 2014).

The presence of a *mantra*, if it is a *mantra*, tempts many commentators to think of this text as tantric (see for example Kūkai’s commentary in Hakeda 1972: 262). Ryūichi Abe (1999) distinguishes Tantra proper from the disparate elements associated with Tantra (specifically a *mantra*) present in Japan before Tantric Buddhism was introduced when Saichō and Kūkai returned from China in the early 9th Century. Similarly, I would argue that the presence of a *mantra* alone, if it is a *mantra*, is not evidence for Tantric Buddhism. Tantra is a context within which elements such as mantras are combined with other essential elements (*mudrā*, *maṇḍala*, *abhiṣeka*, etc), which make a particular kind of sense. Without this context, an isolated element such as a *mantra* cannot be considered Tantric. *Mantra* is a term appropriate to the context of Buddhists involved in bestowing *abhiṣeka* and practising *sādhana*, and arguably not applicable to the environment of the *Heart Sutra*.

More recently, Paul Copp has argued that teleological arguments along the lines that a *dhāraṇī* represents a “proto-Tantric” element have blinded scholars to the significance of *dhāraṇī* in medieval China (2014: 198). Like Abé, Copp’s argument points away from treating the *dhāraṇī* as a “proto-Tantric” feature and opens up the possibility of understanding *dhāraṇī* in its own right. Copp’s

comments apply to *Prajñāpāramitā* qua *vidyā* as much as *dhāraṇī*. Although both *dhāraṇī* and mantra might involve spoken (or, especially in China, *written*) phrases or sounds, they are understood as having different functions. Broadly speaking, the former is protective, while the latter is transformative.

Were it not for the recurring word *mantra* in the text, I suggest that we would conclude that the string “*gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*” is a *dhāraṇī*. For example, unlike almost all mantras, it does not start with *oṃ*⁴²; it does not contain a *bīja* or seed-syllable; and does not relate to a deity or ritual function. On the other hand, it does use a sequence of variants on a word that is characteristic of *dhāraṇī*. Nattier notes (1992: 211, n.52, 53) the similar “spells” contained in the Chinese texts identified by McRae and Fukui, e.g. in T901 《陀羅尼集經》 *Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra*, are referred to as *dhāraṇī*. The character 心 “heart” (in the title of T251) often corresponds to Sanskrit *citta* and is usually translated literally as “heart”; however, Fukui has argued that 心 can also be read as *dhāraṇī* (cited in Nattier 1992: 175-6; 210, n.47). To this, we can add the observation that some of the Nepalese manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* explicitly refer to the text as a *dhāraṇī*.⁴³

Although *vidyā* later becomes, at times, almost synonymous with *mantra*, at the time the *Aṣṭa* and the *Pañcaviṃśati* were composed, Indian Buddhists still saw mantra as non-Buddhist. The Pāli *Nikāyas* contain a few passages making it clear that the chanting of mantras is, at the very least, wrong-livelihood and forbidden for *bhikkhus* (DN i.9; SN i.167, Sn 480). In early Mahāyāna texts (i.e. *Aṣṭa* or *Pañcaviṃśati*), *mantra* was viewed quite negatively (see for example, Conze 1973: 160, 205, and 206). By contrast, the chanting of *parittā*, or protective texts, was already established as a popular Buddhist practice by the time of the *Milindapañha* (150-4). The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* repeatedly refers to *oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ*, the “*mantra*” of Avalokiteśvara, as *ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvidyā* or “six-syllabled great incantation” (2002: 61; cf. Roberts 2012: 230-231). Studholme dates the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* to the fourth century CE. Peter Roberts, also commenting on the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, remarks that, in this context, *vidyā* means “spell” or “incantation” and *mahāvidyā* means “great incantation” (2012: 230). He marks the *sūtra* as having many features in common with the *Prajñāpāramitā*

⁴² The only exceptions I am aware of occur in the *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-tantra*, where mantras may begin with *namaḥ samantabuddhānām...* or *namaḥ samantavaṃśānām...* (see Hodge 2003)

⁴³ For example, (using notation from Conze 1948) Ne: *Ārya-pañcaviṃśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī*, Nh: *Ārya-śrī-pañcaviṃśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī*.

literature, except that the *ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvīdyā* replaces *prajñāpāramitā* as the “supreme principle of Mahāyāna” (2002: 87). Although there is no evidence that the composer of the *Heart Sutra* was aware of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the inclusion of Avalokiteśvara suggests devotion to the cult of the bodhisattva and probably some sympathy with the ideas in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* that feature Avalokiteśvara in a soteriological role.

All this suggests that *mantra* is not only a back-translation but a *mistranslation* of *vidyā*. Though the words in the epithets passage were originally composed in one milieu—where protective incantations were relevant, but *mantras* were alien and forbidden—by the time the Chinese *Heart Sutra* came to be translated into Sanskrit the religious and linguistic landscape in India and China had changed. In the interim *mantra* had been assimilated into Buddhist practice. In other words, the Sanskrit translation of the *Heart Sutra* must have been produced in a milieu where the two characters 明呪 were naturally taken to be two words, and *mantra* seemed the natural translation of 呪 rather than *vidyā* or *dhāraṇī*. This suggests a context where Tantric Buddhism was prominent, *dhāraṇī* had been assimilated to *mantra*, and the non-Tantric nature of the *Heart Sutra* was easily overlooked. This supports Nattier’s conjecture that the translation into Sanskrit occurred relatively late, probably in the 7th century.

The conclusion seems to be that there is no *mantra* in the *Heart Sutra*. Instead, it contains a *dhāraṇī* and refers to *Prajñāpāramitā* as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (*vidyā*). This leaves the modern commentator with a problem. If *mantra* is a *mistranslation* based on a misreading of the Chinese text due to historical shifts in Buddhist terminology, should we “correct” the text? Every Sanskrit witness of the *Heart Sutra* understands the mistaken translation as the correct one. Does any modern scholar have the kind of authority that would legitimise overriding traditional witnesses, stretching back over 1000 years?

The Problem of the Heart Sutra Ur-text

As this study shows, we have a particular problem with the *Heart Sutra*. Conze and other editors have treated the *Heart Sutra* as an Indian, Sanskrit, Buddhist *sūtra*. In creating his critical edition, Conze sought to recreate a putative ur-text in Sanskrit, seeing in it the source of the extant texts in many languages. Now, however, we can say beyond any reasonable doubt that this “ur-text” was a translation from a Chinese text that is similar to, but not exactly like T250

or T251. It was probably created some time in the 7th century, much later than Conze thought. Important as it is to establish the earliest Sanskrit text of the *Heart Sutra*, the ur-text itself was almost certainly Chinese. I would argue that the Chinese ur-text is no longer extant, since none of the surviving versions is sufficiently similar to the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*, or to each other, to have been the source of the others.

A further complication is that our text is a composite made up largely of quotations from other texts. Even if we establish a Chinese ur-text of the *Heart Sutra*, we can still peel away further layers and seek its origins in other texts, mainly of the *Prajñāpāramitā* genre. But the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is itself far from being fixed. A core text has evolved into a number of species of different sizes, each of which has continued to evolve at different rates so that surviving manuscripts of a supposedly “early” text, *Aṣṭa*, may show features that apparently post-date the “later” text *Pañcaviṃśati*. We have reason to believe that the core *Prajñāpāramitā* text was composed in Gāndhārī and only later translated into Sanskrit (Falk & Karashima 2012). Beyond this, the origins of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are obscure, though there are some affinities with Pāli texts (e.g. MN 121, 122, SN 12.15 etc.). Each time we approach the horizon we see a new mountain range far off in the distance. Unfortunately, as we go back in time our sources become fewer and less complete. It may be that the very idea of an ur-text is meaningless under these circumstances. All we can really do is establish the text at certain points in space and time and relate it to the appropriate historical circumstances.

Appendix 1: Parallel Passages

Passage One

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 5.151.a29-b3:⁴⁴ 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是大明呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是無上呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是無等等呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是一切呪王

T221, 8.46a.03-05: 拘翼！是般若波羅蜜者，無上之術。善男子、善女人學是術者，亦不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，亦不念兩惡。

⁴⁴ (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501.)

- T223, 8.283b9-11: 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪，是無上明呪。若善男子善女人，於是明呪中學，自不惱身，亦不惱他，亦不兩惱。
- T1509, 25.463.c07-8: 是般若波羅蜜，是大明呪、是無上呪。
- Kimura PSP_2-3:54-5: mahāvidyaiṣā kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttaraiṣā [55] kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā.
- Gilgit 141v line 8-10: mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā | [9] anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | niruttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā

Aṣṭa

- T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪；如是般若波羅蜜多是諸呪王，最上、最妙、無能及者，具大威力，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。
- T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是無上呪，若能於此精勤修學，不為自害、不為他害、不為俱害，疾證無上正等菩提
- T224, 8.431.c12-21:⁴⁵ 何以故？是般若波羅蜜者極大祝，人中之猛祝。學是祝者，是善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都無所念惡，善為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護人民蝸飛蠕動，學是祝者疾成佛道也。
- T225, 8.484.a1-4: 所以然者，斯定，諸佛神呪，呪中之王矣。學是咒者，不自念惡、不念人惡，都無惡念，是為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護眾生。
- T226, 8.514.a28-03: 是般若波羅蜜者，極大呪，持尊之呪。學是呪者，善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都不念惡，為人中之雄，自致作佛，當護一切人
- T227, 8.542.b5-6 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術，不自念惡，不念他惡，不兩念惡；學是呪術，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，得薩婆若智，能觀一切眾生心。

⁴⁵ Revised per Karashima (2011: 64).

(Vaidya 27-28): *mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
apramāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
aparimāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asamasameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /*

Passage Two

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 7.156.a17-22:⁴⁶ 「世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，最尊最勝、最上最妙，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。何以故？世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多能除一切惡不善法，能攝一切殊勝善法。」爾時，佛告天帝釋言：「如是！如是！如汝所說。何以故？憍尸迦！過去未來現在諸佛，皆因如是甚深般若波羅蜜多大神呪王，證得無上正等菩提，轉妙法輪度無量眾。

T221, 8.48.b14-22: 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術，般若波羅蜜無上之術，般若波羅蜜者無等之術。

T223, 8.286b28-c7: 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提

T1509, 25.468.b21-25: as for T223.

Kimura PSP 2-3:70: *evam ukte bhagavān śakraṃ devānām indram etad
avocat: evam etat kauśikaivam etat, mahāvidyeyaṃ
kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttareyaṃ kauśika
vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyaṃ
kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā.*

⁴⁶ (fasc. 429) = T220-i, 5.580.b27-c13 (Facs. 105) = T220-iii 7.556.a24-26; (fasc. 502).

Gilgit 146v: 12-13 *śakra ahā | mahavidyeyaṃ bhagavan yaduta
prajñāpāramitā | anuttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta
prajñāpāramitā [13] asamameyaṃ bhagavan
vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoḥ |
tathā hi bhagavan prajñāpāramitā sarvakuśalānaṃ
dharmā[ṇāṃ] uccho[ṣa]yitrī sarvakuśalānaṃ
dharmānaṃ dātrī |*

Aṣṭa

T220-iv, 7.777.c05-6: 甚深 般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上
呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，最尊最勝、最上
最妙，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。

T220-v, 7.875.a2-7: 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪、是無上
呪、是無等等呪。

T224, 8.433.b22-3: 極大祝般若波羅蜜，極尊祝般若波羅蜜，無有輩
祝般若波羅蜜。

T225, 8.484.b13-15: 大尊呪

T226, 8.515.c12-20: 釋提桓因白佛：「般若波羅蜜極大呪。天中天！
般若波羅蜜極尊呪、無有輩呪。」佛言：「如
是，如是！拘翼！般若波羅蜜為極大呪，般若波
羅蜜為極尊呪，般若波羅蜜無有輩呪。

T227, 8.543.b28-c3: 「世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無
上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。」佛言：「如
是，如是！橋尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若
波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。何以
故？橋尸迦！過去諸佛，因是明呪，得阿耨多羅
三藐三菩提。未來諸佛，亦因是呪，當得阿耨多
羅三藐三菩提。

(Vaidya 36-7): *mahāvidyeyaṃ bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
apramāṇeyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā
/ aparimāṇeyaṃ bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta
prajñāpāramitā / niruttareyaṃ bhagavān vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyaṃ bhagavan vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamameyaṃ bhagavan
vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /*

Ratnaguna

T229, 8.678.a4-5: 大明般若諸佛母，

Rgs 3.5 *mahavidya prajña ayu pāramitā jinānām* |

Appendix 2: Epithets Correspondence Tables

Hrd	T251 848c18-19	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪
Hrd	T250 847c24-25	Kj		大明呪	無上明呪	無等等呪

Passage One

Chinese Texts

100	T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
25	T220-ii 151. a29-b3 (fasc. 428)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
18	T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08	T220-iv 774.b07-11 (fasc. 540)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
08a	T220-v 873. a28-b1 (fasc. 557)	Xz	大神呪		無上呪		
25	T1509 463.c07-8 (57)	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T223 283.b9-11	Kj		大呪術	無上呪		
08	T227 542.b5-6	Kj		大呪術	無上呪		
25	T221 46a.03-05 (fs. 7)	Mo			無上之術		
08	T226 514.a29	ZF		極大呪	持尊之呪		

‘EPITHETS OF THE MANTRA’ IN THE HEART SUTRA

08	T225 484.a1	ZQ	諸佛神 呪				呪中之 王矣
08	T224 431.c12-21	Lk		極大祝	猛祝		

Sanskrit

- 25: *mahāvīdyā, anuttarā vidyā.* (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)
 25: *mahāvīdyā, anuttarā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā* (Gilgit 141v line 8-10)
 08: *mahāvīdyā, apramāṇā vidyā, aparimāṇā vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā.* (Vaidya 27-8)

Passage Two

Pañcaviṃśati = Kimura (PSP 2-3:70) = Conze (1975a: 237, Chp 28)
 Aṣṭa = Vaidya (36-7) = Conze (1973a: 108-9)

Rgs	T229 678.a4-5	Fx		大明			
25	T1509 468.b21-25 (58)	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
100	T220-i 580. b27-c13 (fasc. 105)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
25	T220-ii 156.a17-22; (fasc. 429)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
18	T220-iii 556.a24-26; (fasc. 502)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08	T220-iv 777.c05-6; (fasc. 540)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08a	T220-v 875.a2-7 (fasc. 557)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T223 286.b28-c7	Kj		大明呪	無上明呪	無等等明呪	

‘EPITHETS OF THE MANTRA’ IN THE HEART SUTRA

08	T227 543.b28-29	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T221 48.b14-22 (fs. 7) 25	Mo		極大術	無上之術	無等之術	
08	T226 515.c12-20	ZF		極大呪	極尊呪	無有輩呪	
08	T225 484.b13-15	ZQ	大尊呪				
08	T224 433.b22-3	Lk		極大祝	極尊祝	無有輩祝	

- 25: mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)
- 25: mahavidya, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Gilgit 146v: 12-13)
- 08: mahāvidyā, apramāṇā vidyā, aparimāṇā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Vaidya 36-7)
- Rgs: mahavidya, vidya (Yuyama 1976: 23) = Conze (1973a: 15)

Abbreviations

<i>Aṣṭa</i>	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
<i>Aṣṭadaśa</i>	<i>Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra</i>
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Fx	Faxian
Kj	Kumārajīva
Lk	Lokakṣema
Mo	Mokṣala
<i>Pañcaviṃśati</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
PSP	Kimura (2010)
Rgs	<i>Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā</i>

Śata	<i>Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra</i>
Sn	Suttanipāta
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
T	Taishō edition of Chinese Tripiṭaka.
Vaj	<i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā</i>
Xz	Xuánzàng
ZF	Zhú Fóniàn
ZQ	Zhī Qiān

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